



DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

KATHLEEN BABINEAUX BLANCO

GOVERNOR

MIKE D. McDANIEL, Ph.D.

SECRETARY

Inaccurate reporting leaves wrong impression

Reporters should be careful about what they write. Many people, who read newspapers, listen to radio stations or watch TV believe that the media is correct when they report something portrayed as “news.” We have found that to be untrue in many cases after Hurricane Katrina.

The floodwater was not “toxic soup,” as many reported, fish in Lake Pontchartrain didn’t disappear and tens of thousands of people did not die because of outbreaks of cholera, malaria or typhoid.

Now, in another case of bad reporting, Rolfe McCollister Jr. writes an editorial in the May 9 Baton Rouge Business Report praising car thieves in New Orleans. He writes, “State Police say cars were mysteriously being towed, and last month a Convent man, who removed 45 ‘stolen’ cars, was arrested. He was crushing them and selling the scrap for \$150 per auto. This is no criminal, he’s a hero. He’s doing exactly what we want done and not charging anyone. Sounds like public service to me.”

When not disposed of properly, the vehicles become an environmental hazard. The vehicles must be drained of fluids like gas and oil. Freon and mercury switches need to be removed. The tires must be taken to a proper facility so they can be recycled. Another problem with thieves taking cars occurs when the thief and the owner disagree on the definition of “abandoned.” If I leave my car parked on the street for 30 minutes and a thief decides my car is abandoned and takes it, then I think of that person as a criminal and not a hero. In the auto contract, owners may have an opportunity to recover their cars if they choose. No such opportunity exists with a criminal operator.

I don’t think New Orleans wants to encourage unauthorized haulers to come and start taking what they consider to be abandoned cars to unauthorized car crushers.

Also, McCollister says “DEQ awarded a low-bid removal contract,” and accuses “DEQ of trying to reward some political friends....” McCollister is wrong. That contract was awarded by the Division of Administration’s Office of State Purchasing and done so by following state bidding laws. That same office is handling the rebidding. This was done so everyone had a fair shot at the contract. No “gymnastics” were necessary as this bid followed the procedures for all state bid contracts.

McCollister’s source in his editorial was an unsuccessful bidder who didn’t get the contract.

McCollister never called DEQ or DOA to ask for information on car removal or the bidding process. It’s irresponsible for a journalist or columnist to use a source with an agenda and not try to verify the information or get the other side of the story.

Sloppy journalism can cause people to be scared for no reason, threaten their livelihood or keep them from moving back to New Orleans. In the case of The Baton Rouge Business Report, McCollister is encouraging criminal activity that endangers the environment and blaming the wrong state agency for actually following state bid rules.

Mike D. McDaniel, Ph.D.

Secretary

Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality

602 N. 5th St.

Baton Rouge, LA 70802

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

: PO BOX 4301, BATON ROUGE, LA 70821-4301

P:225-219-3953 F:225-219-3971

WWW.DEQ.LOUISIANA.GOV